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ABSTRACT

This paper is based on an ethnographic study that examined the study abroad experiences of 20 male Japanese students in Vancouver (Canada) from a post-colonial perspective. This perspective allows the researcher to view the Japanese students studying in the West as deeply embedded in a transnational context where global and national ideologies and discourses become interconnected and manifested throughout their experiences. Three key discourses, neocolonialism, "internationalism," and "nihonjinron" (the discussions of Japanese uniqueness), are explored as the relevant themes to the Japanese students' study abroad experience in the West and used as the key analytical concepts for an ethnographic study. Findings demonstrate how the Japanese students make sense of their experiences in the midst of these global and local discourses. Responding to Edward Said's (1995) call for the production of non-coercive and non-hegemonic knowledge through education activities, the paper argues for the possibility of study abroad experience to realize Said's idealism. Contains 15 notes and a 34-item bibliography. An information sheet on the subjects is appended. (Author/BT)

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Study Abroad
As a Contested Space of Local / Global Discourses: Japanese Students' Experience in the West

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Abstract

This paper is based on an ethnographical study that examines the study abroad experiences of 20 Japanese students in Vancouver from a post-colonial perspective. This perspective allows me to view the Japanese students studying in the West as deeply imbedded in a transnational context where global and national ideologies and discourses become interconnected and manifested throughout their experiences. Three key discourses: neocolonialism, "internationalism," *nihonjinron* (the discussions of Japanese uniqueness) are explored as the relevant themes to the Japanese students' study abroad experience in the West and used as the key analytical concepts for an ethnographical study. The finding demonstrates how the Japanese students make sense of their experiences in the midst of these global and local discourses. In conclusion, responding to the Said's(1995) call for the production of non-coercive and non-hegemonic knowledge through education activities, I argue for the possibility of study abroad experience to realize his idealism.

Introduction

As transnational interactions have accelerated since the late 1980s, "internationalism" has been the social phenomenon in Japanese society (Befu, 1993, Yoshino, 1999, 1996). Japanese industrial, business, and educational institutions actively promote study abroad as one of the most effective means to "internationalize" young Japanese. A large number of Japanese students study abroad to gain "international" exposure and English fluency, thus to become *kokusaijin*, an "international" person (Segawa, 1998).

Vancouver has become one of the most popular destinations for Japanese students who wish to gain "international" experiences. The city hosts the largest concentration of the Japanese nationals in any major Canadian city. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Vancouver hosted 3,602 Japanese nationals in 1998 as visitors.[1] This figure places Vancouver 22nd in the top 50 cities around the world (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 1998).[2] In the spring of 1998, there were 7118 ESL students enrolled in 24 English language institutes in Greater Vancouver Area.[3] Approximately 30 percent of these students were Japanese students. Out of these schools, 23 listed students of Japanese origin as one of the three major national groups in their student body (Study Abroad Bridging Support, 1998).

The paper examines Japanese male students' study abroad experience in Vancouver. I view study abroad as a transnational space where global and local discourses converge and become manifested throughout foreign students' experience. Postcolonial theory forms the key analytical framework for the present study. Colonial and postcolonial scholars such as Said (1993) argue that the legacy of Western imperialism and colonialism remains significant in the contemporary postcolonial world in political, ideological, economic, and social practices. Using this theoretical approach, I view the transnational movements of foreign students as a manifestation of the global neocolonial discourse underpinned by the hierarchical power structure of the world. In addition, as significant as this global discourse are the local discourses surrounding study abroad in a national context that foreign students come from. These views of study abroad both from local and global perspectives have led me to a new conceptual approach

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[1] In addition to this figure, according to the Japanese cousulate in Vancouver, in 1998, there were approximately 2.000 Japanese people in Vancouver with working-holiday visa (MacLellan, 1999).
[2] This figure does not include short-term visitors who are not required for any sort of visa. Given the large number of Japanese short-term visitors in Vancouver, the total number of Japanese nationals in this city can be estimated higher than this figure.
[3] This figure could double count those who attend two schools simultaneously.

to the examination of foreign students' experience: study abroad as a contested space of globalism and localism.

Furthermore, I examine Japanese students' study abroad experiences in terms of Said's (1995) call for the creation of a non-coercive, non-dominative, and non-essentialist knowledge. Since the publication of Orietalism in 1978, Said's (1995, 1993, 1978) academic work centres on his hope for the creation of oppositional discourse through educational experiences, viewing "humanistic study as seeking ideally to go beyond coercive limitations on thought toward a non-dominative and non-essentialist type of learning." (Said, 1995, p. 4) Responding to his call, the present paper attempts to re-examine the conventional assumption that study abroad, through the direct exposure to cultural difference, help students understand human differences from a non-essentialist and non-hegemonic perspective.

Three key local and global discourses emerged as a result of the critical examination of the relationship between the West and Japan: the discourses of neocolonialism, "internationalism," and *nihonjinron*, the Japanese discourse of cultural nationalism. Using the data from the ethnographical study with 17 Japanese male students, I traced the manifestation of these global and local discourses and analysed how these students make sense of their study abroad experiences in Vancouver.

Present Form of Study Abroad in Japan

Due to the rapid appreciation of the Japanese yen over other Western currencies, the cost for studying abroad has become reasonable and in some cases, it is no different from living and studying in major Japanese cities (Ishizuki, 1992). Following China and Republic of Korea, Japan is the third largest sending nation in 1997-98 with 64.284 students studying overseas (UNESCO, 1998)[4]. In 1997-98, over 70 percent of these students (49,073) studied in the United States, which made Japan the leading sending nation in American higher educational institutions (International Educational Institute, 1998). Japan also sends the largest number of foreign students to Canada during the same period.

Ishizuki (1992) exemplifies three characteristics of the contemporary study abroad in Japan as "massive, popularized, and diversified" (p. 37). Japanese students attend a wide range

[4] UNESCO statistics data includes only students who are enrolled in higher educational institutions. It excludes a large number of Japanese students who study English in language institutes.

of educational institutions including English language schools, technical and vocational schools, community colleges, and universities in a foreign country. Students come from various social backgrounds, ranging from high school students, housewives, school dropouts, ex-office ladies[5], university students, corporate employees, and academic scholars and researchers. Furthermore, Ishizuki (1992) terms the central feature of the Japanese contemporary study abroad as "cultural learning." Instead of learning only specialized knowledge and skills in a school environment, it focuses more on the exploration of culture and society outside of the specific institution. The mere exposure to foreign societies and cultures is believed to foster the transnational competency of students: the acquisition of English speaking ability, intercultural understandings and communication skills, and a global perspective.

In addition, Ishizuki (1992) points to the investment-oriented nature of the present study abroad. Ogawa (1998) supports this point in her study on Japanese female students studying in American universities. She shows three main motivations and goals behind these students' study abroad attempt: the improvement of their English, acquisition of educational credentials, and global perspective and awareness. In the current boom of *kokusaika*, or "internationalism" in Japan, those with "international" exposure became highly marketable. Study abroad has become an important mechanism for future career development.

"Internationalism" and Education

Since the late 1980s, the boom of "internationalism" has intensified to the extent that the word *kokusai* or *kokusaiteki*, "international" has become fashionable. People associate these terms with something fine, new, rich, pleasurable, sophisticated, and beautiful (Ebuchi, 1997). A large number of Japanese universities attempted to reorient themselves into more "internationalized" institutions to appropriate this desirable image for their popularity and reputation. For instance, since the late 1980s, Japanese universities established many departments with names that show the "international" focus: the department of "international" business, marketing, law, literature, and culture etc (Ebuchi, 1997). The hiring of native English speakers was another attempt to argument the "international" image of the campus. However, the most noticeable attempt for "internationalisation" was to form "international" exchange programs

[5] It is well known that many Japanese women study abroad after losing hope in their workplace in male-centred Japanese company. (See Kelsky, 1994, Koizumi, 1999)

with universities in Western English speaking countries.[6] Purchasing one's own branch campus overseas is another attempt for increasing "international" image of campuses. In the peak of economic affluence in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, several Japanese private universities purchased college campuses in the U.S., Canada, and England to establish an overseas branch (Chamber, 1990 & Etoh, 1993). The declining number of students for higher education partly explains the recent fad for "internationalizing" university campuses. Due to the decreasing number of future students, many universities, in particular, less prestigious private institutions are more likely to resort to these "international" images to boost their popularity and reputation (Chamber, 1990).

Underlying these attempts of Japanese universities for "internationalism" is the heightened value of "international" image as an educational commodity. In the present hype of "internationalism," Japanese educational institutions attempt to secure its status and reputation by creating on campus the highly valued image of "internationality." This is the local socio-cultural discourse on the relationship between education and "internationalism" in which the present popularity of study abroad has evolved in Japan.

Western Bias in Japanese "Internationalism"

Despite the desirable images of "internationalism," it is important to recognize the fact that the Japanese discourse of "internationalism" seems heavily concentrated on the West (Befu, 1993, Task Force For Transnational Competence, 1997, Yoshino, 1999). Ishizuki & Suzuki (1988) cite a national survey by a Japanese government agency that examined the nations with which the Japanese would associate the term *kokusaika*, "internationalism." Two-third of the response referred to the Western "advanced" nations such as the United States, Britain, France, and Canada, etc. On the other hand, only one-fourth of the responses mentioned Asian and other regions. The survey further showed that this Western centredness of *kokusaika* was more significant among the youth than older generations.

The Western bias imbedded in Japanese discourse of "internationalism" is clearly reflected in the way Japanese universities seek exchange relations with foreign institutions.

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[6] Among numerous attempts, in the early 1990s, Asia University in Tokyo established the largest study abroad program in which every year, more than 700 Asia University students study for one year in five different American universities (Etoh, 1993). In a similar attempt, Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto also established a massive study abroad program with the University of British Columbia, Canada. Ritsumeikan University

Many of the "international" exchange initiatives discussed earlier, focus particularly on the relationships with "English" speaking "Western" universities. Quoting a report issued in the early 1990s, Task Force for Transnational Competence (1997) states that almost 50 percent of all Japanese four-year institutions had formed at least one exchange relation with a foreign institution. Among them, there are as many as 500 exchange agreements recorded between Japanese and American higher educational institutions. In a clear contrast, a 1991 survey, which is also quoted by Task Force for Transnational Competency, shows that only 23 out of more than 600 Japanese universities had an exchange relationship with Asian universities. Even among those institutions that had Asian relations, the availability was extremely limited. UNESCO Statistical data also supports this Western centred tendency. According to UNESCO Statistical Yearbook, 1998, the number of Japanese students going to the major Western countries such as US, UK, France, Germany, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada counts for 84 percent of the total Japanese students studying overseas.

Japan's Relations with the West from a Postcolonial Perspective

To understand this Western centrality of Japan's "internationalism," it is essential to situate it in the global context of Western, particularly, American cultural hegemony over Japan. In doing so, I show the existing neo-colonial discourse between Japan and the West, which is also reflected in Japan's discourse of "internationalism."

Japan has historically had its cultural discourse marginalized in the face of two cultural hegemonies: Chinese and Western Cultures (Befu, 1993,Yoshino, 1999). In the pre-modem period, China was the sole major source of "higher" civilization and exhorted its cultural hegemony over Japan. Japan viewed China as the origin of civilization and thus as the destination of study abroad missions. After Japan's opening to the outside world in the middle of the 19th century, the West replaced China as the major cultural hegemony over Japan. Since then, Western cultures have permeated every corner of Japanese society. The significance of the West was further intensified by the post-war American occupation, which reinforced the hierarchical relations between Japan and the West. The relation of the dominant and the subordinate remains intact as of today. Even after Japan has achieved the present economic

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annually sends 100 students for one-year study abroad experience at the Canadian counterpart.

prosperity, cultural discourse remains flowing from the West, in particular from the United States (Befu, 1993, Miyoshi, 1989).

Colonial and post-colonial scholars argue that the historical legacy of imperialism and colonialism is still manifested in general cultural sphere as well as in specific political, ideological, economic, and social domains (Frankenburg, 1993, hook, 1989, Said, 1995, 1993, 1978, Sarder, 1997, Willinsky, 1998). In the present post-colonial world underpinned by the history of imperialism and colonialism, the West continues to stay in the privileged location over the rest of the world. The West is not simply a geographical category but a distinctive psychological entity in the mind of people excluded from the West (Gandhi,1998).

Japan presents an example of the marginalized people who have been immersed in this very colonial discourse. With the inundation of Western culture in Japan, Katsuichi Honda, the influential Japanese journalist and social critic poignantly expresses his concern about the excessive and uncritical adoption of Western culture in Japan (Honda, 1994). Covering many instances of Western cultural encroachment in many aspects of the Japanese daily life such as the aesthetic standard, lifestyle, and language usage, he argues for the importance of critical consciousness against people's subconscious participation in Western cultural domination. Honda argues that in a fundamental sense, the Japanese are more colonized than they were in the aftermath of the World War II, and points out the colonized mentality of the contemporary Japanese vis-à-vis the West. While most of Honda's writing tends to be based on his personal anecdote, many academics share his point. Creighton (1992), Ivy (1989), and Kelsky (1994) show that the excessive domestication of the West has rendered Japan itself exotic and foreign for the present Japanese generations. Uncritical acceptance of Eurocentric perspective has altered the way the Japanese view themselves, rendering themselves as "Others." Clearly, what Said calls the 'dreadful secondariness' (Said 1989, p. 207) of the Japanese and their culture has been perpetuated by the existing hierarchical relations of knowledge and values.

Nihonjinron: Japanese Cultural Nationalism

The enormous influx of Western influence during the post-WWII period, became a threat to Japanese cultural autonomy, leading to Japanese insecure sense of cultural identity (Befu, 1993, Dale, 1989, Yoshino, 1999, 1997). Japan's cultural marginality to the West created a pressing need for reaffirming its own cultural uniqueness against Western (American) cultural encroachment. In asserting their cultural autonomy, the cultural distinctiveness from the West,

the Japanese have appropriated the essentialized image of the West as the complete "Other" against which Japanese "Self" becomes articulated (Befu, 1993, 1981, Dale, 1989, Yoshino, 1999). This tendency to view the West as the "Other" consistently appears in the long tradition of nation-wide neo-nationalistic discourse of Japanese uniqueness, *nihonjinron*.

Nihonjinron refers to the cultural discourse that focuses on the uniqueness and distinctiveness of Japan and its people from all perspectives (Befu, 1993, Dale, 1989, Yoshino, 1999, 1997). Befu (1993) explains the prevalent dissemination of *nihonjinron* in the following manner:

> The Japanese manifest consuming interest in the question of who they are in a cultural sense, so much so that the discourse on Japanese identity many even be called a minor national pastime. Numerous writers have articulated the nature of this cultural and national identity in voluminous publications. This discourse constitutes a well-recognized genre, with its own appellation. (p.107)

The detailed discussion of the content of *nihonjinron* is beyond the scope of this paper. To sum up, the main theme of these discussions is that the Japanese and their society are distinctively unique and different from other nations linguistically, structurally, racially, culturally, and even anatomically (Goodman, 1989).[7]

The significance of *nihonjinron* lies in that the Japanese uniqueness is asserted by putting Japan in clear contrast to the West (Befu, 1993, Dale, 1989, Miller, 1982). The contrasting images of Western "Others" are selectively employed for the purpose of reaffirming the artificial sense of difference between Japanese "Self" and Western "Others." Given the ubiquitous presence of the West in Japanese society, only by presenting the dominant West as the complete "Others" could the Japanese define and reaffirm their own self-identity.

The essentialist and bi-polar understanding of Japanese "Self" and Western "Others" as seen in *nihonjinron*, inevitably leads to the "false" and "exaggerated" sense of difference and discontinuity. The Japanese, as well as Westerners[8], tend to view Japanese society and the people as group-oriented, harmonious, homogeneous, and shame culture. These images are contrasted to those of the West and Westerners as individual, conflict, plural, and guilt type of

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[7] For a detailed discussion of *nihonjinron*, see Befu (1993) and Dale (1986).

[8] In Western Orientalist discourse, the West traditionally otherize Japan as feminine, irrational, and homogeneous. For further discussions, see Morean (1989), Nagatani & Tanaka (1998), Said (1978), and Wilkinson (1990).

culture (Befu, 1993, Morean, 1989). Thus, in *nihonjinron*, the West is imaged as the world of complete "Otherness" from which the Japanese experience a fundamental sense of difference. Ultimately, it enables them to enjoy a secured sense of cultural and national identity. Once reduced and essentialized, the West no longer poses a threat to Japanese cultural identity. Through the othering process, the West becomes contained and controlled in a way that reinforces the artificial sense of difference between Japan and the West.

Befu (1993) examines *nihonjinron* as a hegemonic ideology, presenting the active involvement of intellectuals, private corporate establishment, and the government in the creation and dissemination of *nihonjinron*. Befu describes the ideological dissemination of *nihonjinron*;

> It is an ideology in another sense, in that it not merely "describe" the constructed world view, but prescribes what is normatively right and therefore how one should conduct oneself. (P. 126)

Befu (1993) also cites Bellah who argues that *nihonjinron* is a form of "civil religion" (p. 127). Without being obviously religious, it performs a religious function by providing normative orientation for the way the Japanese "should" behave and view and understand the external world.

The above descriptions of *nihonjinron* leads to the Foucauldian concept of "discourses;" *nihonjinron* provides a coherent and strongly bounded area of social knowledge that prescribes the "reality" of Japanese "Self" and Western "Others." Similar to the discourse of Orientalism[9], nihonjinron controls and delimits both the mode and the means of representation of "Self" and "Others." The discourse of *nihonjinron* can create not only knowledge but also the "epistemological reality" that denies possibilities of any other alternative perspectives. The essentialist approach to the representation of "Self" and "Others" precludes a more nuanced and multi-dimensional understanding of each other, leading to distortion, exaggeration, and even crude caricature (Nagatani & Tanaka, 1998).

Yoshino (1999) warns us of the manifestation of *nihonjinron* particularly in a cross-cultural context. His study shows that many internationally-oriented corporate establishments create cross-cultural manual that consists of handbook, English conversation materials and

[9] Said (1978) demonstrates the ideologically constructed nature of Western knowledge of the Orient as a discourse that supposedly reflects the "reality" of people in the Orient. See Said (1978) and Gandhi (1998).

glossaries which deal with the distinctiveness of Japanese behaviour and society manifested in business and management practices, unique Japanese customs and expressions, and so forth (Yoshino, 1999, 1992). The assumption behind these attempts is that the distinctiveness and peculiarity of Japanese thought and behaviour could obstruct intercultural communications. Thus, the understanding of cultural difference, in other words, of their own uniqueness is viewed essential to facilitate the interactions with non-Japanese.

The attempt to disseminate *nihonjinron*, in cross-cultural organizations, results from the benign intention: to promote smooth international interactions between the Japanese and non-Japanese. Befu (1993, 1983) and Yoshino (1999) conclude that Japan's attempt to promote "international" interactions and co-operations results in reinforcing *nihonjinron*, raising national consciousness, cultivating national identity and stressing Japan's cultural distinctiveness.

> What started as a well-intended activity to facilitate international understanding thus often had the unintended and ironic consequence of obstructing communication by sensitizing the Japanese excessively to their distinctiveness (Yoshino, 1994).

Summary

Through the above literature reviews, I have sensitized the three key analytical concepts essential for examining Japanese students' study abroad experience in the West: neo-colonialism, "internationalism," *nihonjinron*. In the following pages, I present the findings from my ethnographic study[10] to demonstrate how these local and global discourses were closely intertwined and manifested throughout Japanese students' study abroad experiences in Vancouver.

Otherness of "Canadians"

This section demonstrates how the artificial sense of Otherness became constructed in the way the Japanese students perceived the West, "Canadians[11]." The majority of the Japanese students used metaphorical expressions to refer to "Canadians" such as "alien" (by Toshi),

[10]From April to October 1999, I conducted an ethnographical study on 17 Japanese male students studying in Vancouver.

[11] I mean by "Canadians" Anglo-English speaking Canadians. This reflects the way these students used the term. It excludes any non-Anglo Canadians.

"people from outer space" (by Kengo), "incomprehensible creature" (by Youhei), and "good-looking movie stars in Hollywood movies" (by Takeshi, Yasu). These expressions reveal their preconceived sense of distance and difference from "Canadians." Furthermore, the majority of the Japanese students used adjectives such as "real," "pure," "100%," and "authentic" to refer to "Canadians." This seems to be because of the presence of non-white Canadians that must be distinguished from the authentic "Canadians." This "authenticity" of "Canadians" is determined by the degree of difference and distance from the Japanese and Asians. For Toshi, his "Canadian" host family represents the image of what he called "100% Canadians." He describes what made this family "authentic Canadians" in the following manner.

> KT: What do you mean by 100% Canadian? What are the conditions to become 100% Canadians in your image?
> Toshi: I have my host-family in my mind.
> KT: Tell me about them.
> Toshi: They use their throat in a different way.
> KT: You mean the way they speak?
> Toshi: Yes, it is different.
> KT: Anything else?
> Toshi: They are not considerate to others.
> KT: Anything else? Are they white people?
> Toshi: Yes, they are. (...) They are different in the way they behave and express themselves.

Furthermore, in explaining his different feeling with "real Canadians" from with non-white Canadians, Toshi mentioned many aspects of "truly" Canadian lifestyles in his white host-family: the family sleeping on a couch with their shoes on, a dirty floor in the living room, no curtains on windows. According to him, these are something rarely seen in Japanese and even Asian Canadian families, thus the images of "real Canadians." Toshi's comment exemplifies the general tendency among the Japanese students; the authenticity and purity of "Canadians" is equated with the Otherness. Only those who enable them to feel the Otherness, are qualified to be "Canadians."

This sense of discontinuity from "Canadians," the "Other" excludes any images of familiarity. "Canadians" who speak Japanese or who know Japanese culture are not considered to be "real" Canadian. The "real" Canadians must not have any knowledge about "us." A case in point, Gon came to know a "Canadian" man who were interested in Japanese culture and who

spoke some Japanese language. Despite that he was desperate in making a "Canadian" friend, Gon found it difficult to call him "Canadians." According to him, when "Canadians" are interested in things Japanese, it becomes too easy for him to become friends with them. These are rare "Canadians" and the majority of them do not show any interest in things Japanese. Thus "real Canadians" are not supposed to have any connections with Japanese: they must be distanced and even cold to these students. A true sense of accomplishment comes only when he can finally communicate with and become friends with these "real" Canadians. Things and people that are a part of "Self" are viewed as non-Canadian and as an obstacle for their exploration of the Otherness of the West.

By constructing the essentialized image of the West as the "Other," these students developed the exaggerated and false sense of difference with regard to things and people in the West. "Canadians" were discursively constructed as the complete "Other" that would possess opposing natures in any sense. They have to be at the opposite end from the Japanese in any possible ways; "race," culture, language, lifestyle, and ways of thinking, etc. "Real" Canadians are exclusively those who make the Japanese students feel the symbolic distance from them.

Hierarchical sense of Otherness

The sense of Otherness that the Japanese students attached to "Canadians" must also be understood by putting it in the hierarchical power structure in which the sense of difference towards "Canadians" becomes constructed. Any human differences are not merely differences in a relativistic sense but exist on the basis of unequal power structure that adds sociological significance to human differences in "race," culture, gender, class, and sexual orientation. These differences could create an oppressive force to those who are situated in a subjugated position in the neo-colonial power structure.

The oppressive force was acutely experienced by many of the Japanese students in their relationship with "Canadians," in particular, in the area of physical appearance. All the students cited the difference of appearance as one of the most significant factor that contributed to their sense of difference from "Canadians." They viewed "Canadians" as beautiful, good-looking and physically superior, basing their judgement entirely on the Eurocentric aesthetic norm. They tended to uncritically apply this seemingly neutral norm as an absolute fact in understanding their own difference from "Canadians." The majority of the students assumed that Western physical

characteristics such as blond hair, blue eyes, fair skin as aesthetically superior to those of Japanese.

Eigo showed his awareness of the hierarchical distance from "Canadians." He metaphorically used a relationship between a singer and a follower of the singer to explain the sense of distance that he experienced with "Canadians."

> Eigo: To me, Westerners have been those in movies and magazines up until I came here, since I did not have any Gaijin friends in Japan. And then I came over here and saw many actual white people. Let me give you an example. Here is a Japanese singer that you like. But there is naturally a sense of distance between the singer and you as one of his fans. There is also a sense of admiration on your side, right? Then you happen to have a chance to meet this singer. In this case, do you think you could feel comfortable and become a close friend with the singer instantly? I don't think so. The relationship remains to be the one between a singer and a fun. In the same way, suddenly you have chances to meet those you have seen only in movies, those in different culture. Could you get along immediately? I cannot help but feel some sense of distance from them.

Eigo's juxtaposition between a singer-follower relationship and himself-"Canadians" relationship brilliantly shows his clear awareness of the hierarchical Otherness of "Canadians." Many other students also made a similar point; Kazuo, Yasu and Takeshi expressed their image of "Canadians" as those who looked like famous actors and actresses in movies. For these students, much in the same way singers and movie stars seemed distanced and living in a different world, so did "Canadians." They became subconsciously aware of this hierarchical distance in their sense of difference with "Canadians." Thus, it is not merely in a cultural relativistic sense but also in a vertical and hierarchical sense that "Canadians" were felt distanced from these students.

The sense of admiration towards "Canadians" naturally led them to feel a sense of cultural and physical inferiority. The inferiority complex affected the way these students perceived and socialized with "Canadians." Particularly, Kengo had an acute sense of inferiority in their Asians appearance in comparison to that of "Canadians." This sense of inferiority further encouraged him to experience a strong sense of discontinuity from them.

> Kengo: When I am with Asians, at least there is one less concern than with white people. (When I am with white people) there is awareness that we do not look cool compared with them. Don't you have the concern that some day they might

say you are not cool or something?
KT: You are not cool?
Kengo: Yes, because if I were a white person, I would say so to a Japanese guy, things like, "you little Japanese boys." On the other hand, when I am with Asians, there is no concern like that. We are about the same height and we have the same flat faces.

These students tended to internalize the colonial discourse, in particular, on human beauty and consequently view "Canadians" as the highest standard against which they measured themselves.

This assumed hierarchical difference led these students to feel a sense of tension and challenge in their associations with "Canadians." For instance, Shinji found "Canadians" unapproachable especially on his first meeting with them.

Shinji: Before I talk to them, at a party or something, I wonder what I should do. The person looks cool, so I get worried that he or she might be stuck up. But once I actually talk to them, they could be very casual and unexpectedly be willing to listen to my story and to share their own stories as well. In that case, I don't feel inferior to them. But before talking to them, I cannot help feeling the inferiority since I don't know how they would respond to me and they look apparently different from the Japanese.

The image of "Canadians" as aesthetically superior and incomprehensible "Others" had a significant impact on the way Shinji perceived and socialized with "Canadians." The mere presence of "Canadians" became an intimidating and oppressive force that Shiji and other Japanese students acutely experienced. This also means that mere socialization with "Canadians" requires a great deal of courage and determination. As discussed later, for some students, this sense of challenge paradoxically becomes a source of motivation for the Japanese students to seek "Canadians."

"Canadians" as Prize

For Japanese students, study abroad has become an important means for acquiring "internationality" which is expected to increase their marketability in Japan. Given the limited amount of time that they had in Vancouver[12], they needed to "internationalize" themselves, by

[12] 17 out of 15 participants planned to stay in Vancouver for no more than one year.

being fully exposed to "Canadians," through which they would learn "authentic" Western culture and "pure" English. The Japanese students actively sought any opportunities to become associated with "Canadians." Despite this expectation, many faced the difficulties of accessing "Canadians." In fact, the majority of the students did not have any "Canadians" friends at the time of the interviews.[13] This limited exposure to "Canadian" put these students in a frustrating situation.

Having realized this difficulty, many attempted to change the frustrating status quo. For those who were studying at English language institutes, their friendship network tended to be confined within the language schools where only non-Canadians were studying. Even for those who were studying at a university or college, their exposure to "Canadians" was as limited as for those studying at English language institutes. Youhei exemplified the frustration that many other students also shared.

> Youhei: I did not expect this many Asians. In the first one month, I was at the English language institute, and there most of the students were either Japanese, Koreans, and Chinese. Having realized this, I thought this is totally different from what I had expected.
> KT: So, it was different from your expectation?
> Youhei: Yes, I might have initially expected that there would be only whites here, so that I felt there were very few whites here.

Kazuo also faced the same problem at a language school where he had difficulties accessing "Canadians." He was fully aware of his lack of associations with "Canadians" among whom he initially expected himself to be. In rare occasions when he met "Canadians," they were rendered the mere mediums through which he could learn the language and culture of the West.

> Kazuo: While I was at the English school, I was thinking how I could become a friend with Canadians, White people. At the time, since I was very serious about studying English, I, by any means, wanted to speak to them as much as possible for practicing my English. Also I tried to approach them to know more about Canada.

Out of the frustration, many of the Japanese students attempted to go outside their respective school environments into "the real Canadian world." Eigo, Kazuo, Shoji, Yasu,

[13] At the time of the interviews, all the participants had already spent more than 6 months in Vancouver.

Saburo, Toshi, Masa, and Takeshi attempted to become friends with "Canadians" through a language exchange program with university students who were studying Japanese. All of these students cited becoming friends with and speaking English with "Canadians" as the main motivations behind their attempts. Masa, Saburo, Shoji, Toshi, and Yasu came to my Japanese class at a university as language volunteers. Expecting to see "Canadian" students in the class, they were disappointed to find very few "Canadian" students.[14] For them, it was supposed to be a way of meeting "Canadian" friends.

Since their exposure to "Canadians" was less than they had initially expected, any opportunities that could lead to their association with "Canadians" became the primary priority in their study abroad experiences. Many appreciated their associations with "Canadians" more than with "other" Canadians and international students. Some students like Yasu even considered their close associations with Asians as a stumbling block that would prevent him from realizing his primary objective: developing friendships with "Canadians."[14]

> KT: Sounds like you appreciate more your friendship with white people?
> Yasu: At this point, I would like to get to know as many white people as possible. That's why I would like to avoid them.
> KT: Who are they?
> Yasu: Asians.
> KT: Are you including Asian Canadians as well?
> Yasu: Yes.

Spending time with Asians, regardless of their birthplace and English fluency, is less worthwhile than with "Canadians." The crucial difference between these two groups lies in the Otherness of the latter, which would presumably "internationalise" the Japanese students.

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[14] These students volunteered in my Japanese language classes in the spring session of 1998 and the summer session of 1999 at University of British Columbia.

[14] Vancouver hosts a large number of recent Asian immigrants. In 1996, immigrants consisted of more than one-third of the population in Vancouver Metropolitan Area. For immigrants who lived within this area, 53.5 percent arrived after 1980. This must be understood with the fact that approximately 70-80 percent of the recent immigrants are from Asia, mainly from Hong Kong, Taiwan, China, and South Korea (Ministry of Finance and Corporate Relations, 1997).

Commodifying "Canadians"

The strong desire for the Otherness of "Canadians" led to their tendency of commodifying and objectifying "Canadians"; transforming them into a discursive medium through which these Japanese students attempted to "internationalize" themselves. "Canadians" became a tool for practising their English and experiencing "true Canadian" culture. A significant number of the participants viewed "Canadians" as a final test for their English. For them, it is when they communicates with the "Canadians" without feeling any sense of fear, nervousness, and linguistic difficulties, that they will finally enjoy the sense of satisfaction and thus stop being too preoccupied with their English. This sense of accomplishment is not possible with "other" Canadians, who do not possess the Otherness that makes the communication thrilling and challenging.

The use value associated with "Canadians" made the personality and individuality of "Canadians" less significant. Many students had the experience of trying to become friends with "Canadians" even when they found personality conflicts with them. Toshi's only "Canadian" exposure was through his host family. He found a personality conflict with a son of the host family but attempted to spend as much time as possible with him, since the son was the only "Canadian" acquaintance at his age. Being frustrated at not being able to make any other "Canadian" friends, the use value of "Canadian" overrode the discomfort that resulted from the personality conflict. The narratives of desire for "Canadians" has shown that the Japanese students' concern is not so much with the individual personalities of "Canadians" but with the associated value of "Canadians." Through "Canadians," these students could obtain more exposure to "authentic" Canada and "pure" English, both of which were viewed essential for "internationalizing" themselves.

The higher value associated with "Canadians" leads to a clear equation of "Canadians" with other value-laden commodities such as Western brand name goods. Much in the same way these brand name goods would do, the association with "Canadians" brings the Japanese students a heightened sense of pride and privilege over others. For example, Kengo was one of a few among his peers, who started a friendship with "Canadians" in the first two weeks of his study abroad program.

Kengo: While I was playing catch on the beach (with my Canadian friends), I saw

other Japanese students in the same program hanging out on the beach. At the time, my feeling was, "Look at me, guys. I have already made a friend with these people. Good luck, you guys!" There was a sense of pride and privilege in me.

The sense of pride and privilege that Kengo experienced would not be possible unless there was a consensus among the Japanese on the higher value of the association with "Canadians."

Furthermore, many of the Japanese students were preoccupied with presenting themselves with "Canadians" to his friends and parents in Japan. They were worried that the absence of "Canadians" in their pictures would not meet the expectation of their peers and family in Japan. This concern also reveals the highly commodified value of "Canadians," not to mention, the extent to which Canada is generally viewed as a white nation in Japan. Asked why he was so shocked to find that most of his friends were Asians and Asian immigrants, Kazuo, among others, revealed his desire to appropriate the higher social value associated with "Canadians";

Kazuo: I am not yet sure about this but I probably don't think this way any longer. Anyway before, I thought "What am I gonna do if I go back home without making any Canadian friends!" I would show my pictures to my friends in Japan. And then people in these pictures are not Canadians. The are all Asians.
KT: What do you mean?
Kazuo: I worried what my friends would say.
KT: What did you expect they would say?
Kazuo: They would say, "What happened to white girls?"
KT: White girls?
Kazuo: Yes, White girls that I was talking about before I left Japan.
KT: Did you actually say thing like that?
Kazuo: Yes, people say thing like that you know. They would say something like, "there could be a chance to see White girls, you are lucky." Didn't anybody tell you that? Probably somebody must have told you.

Here again, "Canadians" became things by which the Japanese students could experience the elevation of their own value. In Kazuo's case, "Canadian" women were rendered to a rare commodity, a prized possession, and sexual objects. The presentation of themselves with "Canadians" in pictures would have shown to their friends and family about the exploration of and immersion in the Western "Otherness." It would have also proven their capability to function well in the Western world of unfamiliarity and superiority, in other words, their mastery of "internationality."

The tendency of commodifying "Canadians" is further witnessed in these students' desire to monopolize "Canadians." Once these students possess highly prized "Canadians," they attempt to monopolize the associated social and practical value. This is exemplified in the participants' reluctance of introducing their "Canadian" friends to other Japanese friends. Kengo shows his dehumanizing tendency towards "Canadians" in explaining his reluctance to introduce his "Canadian" friend to other Japanese. In the quote below, he metaphorically referred to his only "Canadian" friend, Jeff and the friendship with him respectively as "my crop" and "the paddle field."

> Kengo: I felt like "Why do I have to give others my crop?" It is I myself who have long cultivated the paddle field from which the crop has grown. They should make their own effort to get one for themselves."

According to Kengo's reasoning, he made much effort to maintain and develop the relationship with Jeff. Thus, he should have an exclusive right to enjoy the benefits of the "crop." In fact, Kengo had not introduced to his other Japanese friends, Jeff whom he met at the beginning of his study abroad program. Yasu also shared Kengo's unwillingness to share the "crop" with other Japanese friends.

> KT: Do you have any problem introducing your white friend to other Japanese friends?
> Yasu: I feel reluctant. I have a desire to monopolize them. I don't feel like introducing them to others. I have finally become a friend with them so I don't feel like introducing them to others. (...) I don't mind being introduced but don't like introducing them.

The value of "Canadians" can be maintained and increased only if they are exclusively owned. In this sense, they must remain to be a private possession, which enables the owner to feel the sense of exclusive privilege and pride over other Japanese. In this regard, "Canadians" could be any "Canadian" individuals. Their individual personalities are erased and only the associated higher value remains significance to the Japanese students. The Japanese students tended to render "Canadians" into a mere medium through which they attempted to practice English and explore the West, thus to "internationalize" themselves.

Appropriation of Otherness for Self-Transformation

This section provides the further analysis of the narrative of desire for "Canadians." I have demonstrated the significance of the Otherness of "Canadians" in the Japanese students' commodifying desire towards "Canadians." This section shows that the Otherness of "Canadians" possesses a transforming possibility for the Japanese students' "internationalization."

The previous chapter has shown that the preconceived differences between "Canadians" and Japanese "Selves" were so significant that the interactions with "Canadians" became the source of fear, tension and thrill. Thus, the full immersion among them was perceived to require a great deal of courage, endurance, and determination, posing them psychological challenges. This assumed "Otherness" of "Canadians" makes the association and communication with them more exciting, challenging, and thus more rewarding. Since these students viewed "Canadians" as being the most culturally and physically discontinuous from the Japanese, they found communicating with and understanding "Canadians" as the most difficult and challenging, thus the most satisfying.

These students continued to actively seek this sense of being highly challenged among "Others." This point was proved by the higher sense of satisfaction and accomplishment that the students attributed to their associations with "Canadians." Many students experienced more sense of satisfaction and accomplishment in their associations with "Canadians" than with others, as exemplified in the following Yasu's comment..

> KT: Does you feel differently either when you are with Asian Canadians or with white Canadians?
> Yasu: Yes, I do. I have to speak English with whites.
> KT: But you speak English with both, right?
> Yasu: But I feel whites are more significant.
> KT: Can you explain on that further?
> Yasu: They make me feel I have really spoken English. It gives me a great sense of satisfaction.
> KT: So it is for the sense of satisfaction that you spoke English with white people.
> Yasu: Yes, it really makes me feel I am communicating in English.

The above comment reveal the significance of the assumed Otherness of "Canadians" that determines the Japanese students' sense of satisfaction and achievement. It is only when they

overcome the nervousness they experience with "Canadians," that they would finally enjoy a full sense of achievement and satisfaction.

The Japanese students viewed their direct exposure to the assumed "Otherness" of the West as opportunities for further developing their potentiality. The discursive Otherness of "Canadians" becomes an empowering agent for the Japanese students' transformation: "internationalization." As shown in the above examples, many Japanese students attempted to overcome the physical and psychological challenges posed by "Canadians." I argue that the driving force behind their attempt to encounter and overcome these challenges comes from their desire to "internationalise" themselves. It is only after overcoming the Otherness that the Japanese students could finally come by the "internationality."

Study abroad experiences were expected to help these students move ahead of others in Japan. Given the boom of "internationalism" in Japan, the mere exposure to the West can possess a significant importance to these students. In addition, living in the West is assumed to present many difficulties due to the preconceived cultural discontinuity between Japan and the West. For the purpose of transforming themselves, the Japanese students willingly sought and faced the challenge. It was not until they overcame the challenge that they would find themselves fully transformed into "international" selves. Kengo exemplifies this point.

> KT: You have been telling me that you feel comfortable with Asian friends, right?
> Kengo: Yes, Yes.
> KT: But you are still finding your relationship with the Whites more important. It sounds to me that you are a bit contradicted. Can you elaborate on that more?
> Kengo: I want to develop my potentiality even with those I cannot feel comfortable with, even with those I cannot feel to be friends in a fundamental biological sense. I want to develop my potentiality of getting along with these people. While I have a good sense that I can become a friend with Asians, I don't feel that way with the Whites. Nonetheless, I feel like trying to develop my potentiality with these people.

"Canadian" became a transforming agent for Japanese to capitalize on. Their Otherness, associated with the sense of admiration ,fear, and challenge, turned "Canadians" into an empowering agent for the Japanese students' "internationalization."

While these students expected the transforming power of study abroad experiences in the West, many were also dissatisfied with the lack of Otherness, the source of challenge in the West. These students' expectation of being challenged was unfulfilled largely by the lack of exposure to

"Canadians" and the large presence of perceived familiarity in Vancouver: other Asians and Asian Canadians. Their assumed cultural continuity and physical similarity did not allow these Japanese students to enjoy a sense of challenge that they would have felt with "Others," "Canadians." The presence of the perceived familiarity became a stumbling block for these students to accomplish their primary objective of the trip.

As has been repeatedly noted, the lack of "Canadian" friends was the major concern that all the Japanese students shared. They were dissatisfied and frustrated with this fact and trying to seek the opportunities through volunteer activities in a local community or through university language exchange programs. Nonetheless, out of frustration, many of the students criticized themselves for not making sufficient effort to become exposed to "Canadians." For the Japanese students, study abroad was supposed to be a sort of *shugyou*, a rigorous training for mental and physical strength. However, instead of spending time with those who would challenge them, they found themselves among Asian Canadians and Asians from China, Korean and Taiwan. While they enjoyed the friendship with these friends, they felt frustrated at not being able to move into the challenging White world.

For Gon, the main objective of his studying abroad was to highly challenge himself in the world of "Otherness" for fostering his mental and physical strength. He expressed his disappointment about the lack of "Canadian" friends after two years of his study abroad experience. He blamed himself for it; he was not making as much effort as possible to seek the challenge that he was primarily in Canada for.

> Gon: The problem is the fact that though I am in a white society, I don't have any white friends. Since I have not entered the white society, I don't speak English and don't learn the culture. I really need to challenge myself. Among Asians, I don't get challenged much since we are similar in our languages and cultures. With them, I don't get challenged at all. I think that challenging myself means entering the white society. I need to challenge myself by overcoming the barriers of language, culture, and race. That's why I think I am not challenging myself enough. I get frustrated by the fact that I am not challenging myself and even getting indulged. I am timid.

Gon viewed it as an indulgence to socialize with Asians since they were comfortable "us." Clearly, his friendship patterns centred not on a sense of comfort and relief that people would normally seek in a friendship but rather on a sense of challenge.

Facing the same problem, many other students also criticized themselves for not making sufficient effort to become immersed in "Canadianness." Eigo provided another typical example of this kind.

> Eigo: Having spent half a year so far, I am not satisfied with what I have done at all.
> KT: Why?
> Eigo: I could have done harder. I regret.
> KT: What could you have done harder, for example?
> Eigo: I should have been more active.
> KT: In what sense? What do you mean by active, in what way could you have been more active?
> Eigo: For instance, I should have looked for more opportunities to meet Canadians. This is the biggest problem that I have.
> KT: So, that is something you did not do enough.
> Eigo: I said before that there were very few chances for meeting Canadians. But it is not that there were few chances, but it is simply because I was not making enough effort to meet them. I could have done more. There were opportunities to meet Canadians but I was not actively trying to get to know them. Even when I met Tom, (his only "Canadian" acquaintance) it was because he talked to me, not because I talked to him. I was very happy though. I should have talked to more people. (...) I really need to make more Canadian friends. This is something that I have not done enough in the past half year.

Summary of findings

The analyses of the findings demonstrated the manifestation of the three key discourses: neocolonialism, "internationalism," and *nihonjinron* throughout the Japanese male students' study abroad experiences. They also showed how these students made sense of their experiences in the midst of these discourses. In the narrative of desire for "Canadians," the discursive image of "Canadians" was constructed in the intricate mix of these three key discourses. In the discourse of Japanese "internationalism," the West is the dominant and the superior that defines the "internationality" the Japanese students desired to gain. At the same time, based on *nihonjinron* theory of cultural difference, the West, "Canadians" represent the complete "Other" to the Japanese students that pose them a sense of distance and thus psychologically challenge them. These three discourses became closely connected to turn "Canadians" the empowering agency by which the Japanese students attempted to achieve self- "internationalization." It is not until the Japanese students gain a sense of confidence with "Canadians" that they could expect

this self-transformation. "Canadians" were viewed as a monolithic "Others" without any traces of individualities. They were rendered into mere commodities that these students sought to appropriate for their self-transformation: self-"internationalization."

Conclusion

Study abroad has been considered as the best way to promote international understandings and co-operation among different cultures and nations. The underlying assumption is that complete immersion in a foreign culture would help narrow the cultural gap and endow students with intercultural communication skills and a global perspective. However, as shown in the findings of the present study, the sense of symbolic gap between the West and Japan remained significant throughout their study abroad experiences. Or rather the gap seems to have been widened further. What is worse, the strong desire for "internationalising" "Self" drove these students to commit a worse kind of racism.

The sense of false division needs to be eradicated to promote mutual understandings among diverse cultures and "races." Borrowing Said (1995) words, educational experiences have the potential to help students go beyond "coercive limitations on thought toward a non-dominative and non-essentialist type of learning" (1995, p.4). The point of his argument is not to dismiss any cultural difference that exists between the West and East. Certainly, cultural difference exists in any two cultures and it should be recognized, celebrated, and respected. Instead, Said (1995) argues for the importance of challenging "a frozen reified sense of opposed "Others"" (p.6) to be able to perceive others as humans with a personality and individuality. Orientalist and *nihonjinron* binarism of "Self" and the "Other" creates the "epistemological reality" both on "Self" and the "Other" that denies possibilities of any other alternative perspectives. It precludes a more nuanced and multi-dimensional understanding of each other, leading to distortion, exaggeration, and caricature. Thus, to promote sound intercultural understanding through such educational experiences as study abroad, more initiative must be taken to help students challenge this ideologically constructed nature of knowledge.

The transformative possibility of study abroad lies in the direct exposure to "Others" whom students had known only through media representations. Direct interactions with "Others" could, as has been conventionally believed, have a transformative possibility that would enable students to view "Others" from a non-coercive perspective. However, as the present paper

demonstrated, there is a need to critically examine this conventional assumption on the positive effect of study abroad experience. Study abroad programs must be reoriented in a way to help students deconstruct the way in which global and regional discourses shape their understandings of "Self" and "Others." It will be beyond the focus of the present paper to provide any concrete blueprint for study abroad program that would promote this transformative learning process. Nonetheless, I hope that the present paper has pointed out the pressing necessity for this initiative.

APPENDIX A

INFORMATION ON PARTICIPANTS

Name	Age	Time spent in Vancouver	Institution they were studying at/ Educational background in Japan
Kazuo	23 yrs old	2 years	Studying at English Language School in the first year. Presently a first year student at a Community College University graduate
Gon	20 yrs old	2 years	Studying at English Language School in the first year Presently a first year student Community College High school graduate
Sh ji	30 yrs old	8 months	Studying at an English Language School. Came to Vancouver after quitting a job. University graduate
Yasu	23 yrs old	8 months	Studying at an English language School. On Working Holiday Visa University Graduate
Sabur	21 yrs old	9 months	Studying at English language school. On Working Holiday Visa High school graduate.
Y hei	23 yrs old	1 yr and 6 months	Student exchange program 4th year university student Spend one year in student exchange in the previous year.
Tatsuo	20 yrs old	9 months	Student exchange program 2nd year university student
Jir	20 yrs old	9 months	Student exchange program 2nd year university student
Kengo	23 yrs old	9 months	Student exchange program 3rd year university student
Shinji	22 yrs old	6 months	Studying at an English language school. Took one-year absence from his university in the end of his third year.
Jun	22 yrs old	7 months	Studying at an English language school. Took one-year absence from his university in the end of his third year.
Toshi	22 yrs old	8 months	Studying at an English language school. Took one-year absence from his university in the end of third year.
Masa	22 yrs old	7 months	Studying at an English language school. Took one-year absence from his university in the end of third year.
Ry	22 yrs old	7 months	Studying at an English language school. Took one-year absence from his university in the end of third year.
Takeshi	27 yrs old	8 months	Studying at an English language school. Preparing to get into a graduate school in Vancouver. University graduate
Y ya	28 yrs old	8 months	Studying at an English language school. Preparing to get into a graduate school in Canada. University graduate
Eigo	24 yrs old	6 months	Studying at an English language school. University graduate

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